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## **The Psychosocial Challenges of Establishing the Field of Psychosocial Studies**

**Sasha Roseneil<sup>1</sup>**

### **PROLOGUE**

*There is no such thing as a single human being, pure and simple, unmixed with other human beings. Each personality is a world in himself, a company of many. That self, that life of one's own, which is in fact so precious though so casually taken for granted, is a composite structure which has been and is being formed and built up since the day of our birth out of countless never-ending influences and exchanges between ourselves and others [...] These other persons are in fact therefore parts of ourselves, not indeed the whole of them but such parts or aspects of them as we had our relation with, and as have thus become parts of us. [...] We are members one of another (Riviere, 1952:166-167)*

I have Wendy Hollway, who will be my respondent today, to thank for introducing me to the work of Joan Riviere, back in Leeds at the end of the 1990s, when we were working together on a project on care, values and the future of welfare. These evocative and powerful words ignited my psychosocial imagination, and set me on the path to here. And still today they capture

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something of the essence of what Psychosocial Studies is about for me, and so they serve as a prologue to this talk.

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## **PART 1**

Across the many differences that animate Psychosocial Studies, I will risk suggesting that we share an impulse to historicize, contextualize, specify, and criticize, and so I hope that I depart from (some small patch of) common ground when I propose that the biggest challenge we face in establishing this emergent field of ours, is the contemporary condition of hyper-reflexivity that accompanies this impulse, and that we ourselves embody and exemplify almost perfectly...

*Or, am I just talking about myself here?*

Is this a broad, generalizable feature of late modernity, or is it is a characteristic of the white European/ global northern/ Anglophone postmodern academy?

Is this a cultural diagnosis of a societal condition, or the self-referential angst of a politically disillusioned, educated elite?

*Or is it just me?*

You are all too knowing, too post-Foucauldian, to be seduced by the confessional mode, so I can tell you quite frankly that I know that I am speaking here from an autobiographical place, even as I understand my condition to be not mine alone.

Accompanying me in the often lonely business of leading an academic life, of the solitary struggle to think and write, is a multitude of voices, 'a company of many', in Joan Riviere's words - a group in my head - whose members interrupt and divert me, challenge and provoke me, undermine and critique me. Lately, in the period since we formalised the Psychosocial

Studies Network into this new Association for Psychosocial Studies - of which I find myself the first Chair, this rather obstreperous group of mine has been pestering me with one particular question:

*Why would anyone in her right mind throw in her lot with this tenuous enterprise, a new field with no clear history or tradition, and almost no institutional resources, let alone get involved in setting up its “learned society”?*

Because my mind is populated with contrary characters, because I hear their voices loud and clear, because my psychosocial imagination leads me to believe, perhaps as a self-conciliating strategy, perhaps as defence, perhaps even correctly, that these difficult, disputatious debaters are not (entirely) my own invention, my individual affliction, and because I believe in the political value and transformative power of bringing out into the open and sharing that which we experience as the conflicts of our singular interiority, I will tell you what they have said to me, particularly during the frustrating months when our attempts to lodge our meagre funds in the care of the HSBC bank were repeatedly blocked by bureaucracies that assumed we were seeking to deposit ill-gotten gains from transnational drug deals, and late at night as sleep is postponed by emails flying back and forth about the setting and scaling of membership and conference fees, about venue hire, institutional sponsorship, about Twitter accounts, conference structures, calls for papers, keynote speakers, and much more besides. Proffering opinions that I hear variously as wise, rational and astute, cynical, critical and paranoid, friendly and well-meaning, hostile and malicious, the members of my group free associate amongst themselves... one voice picking up a theme opened up by another, mirroring, resonating, contradicting and expanding on each other... a veritable cacophony of irritations:

*Committee work is for losers – everyone knows that ‘administration’ is the last refuge of the uncreative, the literal-minded, the failing - the gendered, undervalued, bottomless pit that is the housework of academic life...*

*It won’t write your book, win you your next grant, boost your h-index, advance your research reputation, which, after all, is what really matters...*

*Does [world renowned and much admired theorist X] wake up worrying about the psychosocial semiotics of retro modern vs hi-tech vs hand-crafted looking website designs and logos?*

*Does [world renowned and much admired theorist Y] tie himself in knots about the politics and ethics of waving, or not, attendance fees for speakers, and spending membership fees on post-conference meals for committee members and keynotes?*

*Does [world renowned and much admired theorist Z] spend their evenings struggling to reconcile Excel spreadsheets, membership and Jiscmail lists?*

*I don’t think so...*

*Their minds are on higher things...*

*And aren’t you just going to making enemies doing this?*

*Your old colleagues in Sociology think you’ve defected, lost the plot, betrayed your clan.*

*You’re an exile from Sociology now, beyond the Pale; there’s no going back...*

*And face it, you’re bound, at some point, to offend many, if not most of your new Psychosocial compatriots.*

*They will feel politically, theoretically or personally side-lined or excluded by decisions about conference themes and keynote speakers, however hard you try to be politically astute, theoretically inclusive, and personally welcoming...*

*There will be individual malcontents and wounded egos, and anti-group processes will undermine and destabilize whatever you try to create, especially as it starts to gain some solidity of form, some external recognition or critical mass...*

*The idea that you can create an association that will transcend, let alone heal, the splits and schisms, the feuds and antagonisms that are carried into Psychosocial Studies from psychoanalysis, that most fissiparous of fields, and that exist between psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, between psychoanalysis and sociology, between sociology and psychology, just for starters, is ludicrous – an omnipotent fantasy...*

***But** it has to be said, you *\*are\** trying hard... and it's sweet that you are so committed to Psychosocial Studies, that you'll take all this on.  
Bless.*

*But what about the free-riders, who won't ever put anything into this collective work, yet who, luxuriating in all the time you don't have, will become its authorities, will be commissioned by publishers to write the field-defining texts, and funded to carry out the ground-breaking research?*

*Hey, be careful you don't end up bitter and twisted, resentful and envious...  
The Miss Havisham of Psychosocial Studies.*

*Surely you'd be better off leaving it for others to do...?  
Someone else would, if you didn't...  
You're not giving anyone else a chance...*

*Shouldn't you be putting yourself first, before this nebulous, barely existent, already fractious, community of scholars?*

*In this individualized, post-welfare state world, only you are responsible for your health and well-being.*

*No one is looking out for you, checking you aren't over-working....*

*No one will put a break on it for you...*

*You are doing this to yourself...*

*You're your own worst enemy.*

*You're a self-sabotaging, control freak.*

*You need to take better care of yourself.*

*Think of all the time you spend hunched over your computer and sitting in meetings when you could be swimming, sleeping, doing pilates...*

*And, yes, indeed, what about the body?*

*Good to remember you have one...*

*Now we are starting to get to the crux of it – the whole question of what this field is about...*

*Is Psychosocial Studies really the answer? (And if it is, what's the question?)*

*Isn't it too weighed down by social constructionism, reproducing the whole post-Enlightenment denigration of the embodied?*

*Denying the materiality of biology, the psycho-socio-somatic nexus?*

*Might those neuros not have a point?*

*And isn't epigenetics where it's at?*

*And then there's the question of animals, objects and the environment - the complex, inter-related, generative, non-human world – what could be more important, as we teeter on the edge of environmental catastrophe?*

*Can splicing together 'psycho' and 'social' really meet these challenges?*

*Do you really need to break with Sociology and Psychology to achieve your goals?  
Aren't they both capacious spaces, open to contestation and change, rather than the  
firmly fixed disciplines weighed down by tradition that you imagine them to be?  
Are they really as closed off from each other as you think?  
Aren't you down-playing the theorists they have in common, the vibrancy of social  
psychology, the importance of critical and discursive psychology, the history of  
psychoanalytic social research, the possibilities of psycho-sociology (which after all is  
now a REF recognised sub-field of sociology?)  
What about Mead?  
And, heavens, the Frankfurt School didn't need to set up a whole new field...*

*Anyway, Sociology is, as Comte said right at the get-go, the 'queen science'<sup>2</sup> – reigning  
over the petty turf wars of the lesser social sciences...  
It's Sociology that owns the social, and even if you don't agree, most of Psychosocial  
Studies – especially the refugees from Psychology - seem to think, in the final analysis,  
that the social incorporates, constructs, and trumps the psychic, the cultural, the  
economic, the spatial, the temporal, the biological, the technological...  
Under the rule of such social determinism, what need is there for anything but  
Sociology?*

*And even if movements for intellectual and political decolonization have nudged  
Sociology off her imperial throne, and even if you don't buy the 'Sociology can do it all'  
argument, you have to admit that it's a parasitical discipline, a scavenger, in John Urry's  
terms<sup>3</sup>, feeding on the crumbs dropped by other fields – the traditional ones and the  
identity knowledges that shook the academy over past 30 years...*

*And remember how Sociology hoovered up Women's and Gender Studies, the field into  
which you poured the first ten years of your career.*

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<sup>2</sup> Comte (1896).

<sup>3</sup> Urry (1981).



*After their brief moment of glory and the establishment of autonomous centres and departments, aren't they all now safely back in the sociological fold – structurally incorporated, but not without some real transformations to research agendas.*

*If absorption into the mainstream is the inevitable fate, and mark of success, of interdisciplinary challenges, and if this might actually bring about real change, reshaping Sociology in ways that you actually desire, why bother with the intervening stage of institutionalizing Psychosocial Studies?*

*Why not work within? Where the real power lies...*

*And, lest you forget, you have to tick the 'sociology' box on your funding applications. You have to enter the REF as Sociology.*

*You spend your time carving out a distinctive space for Psychosocial Studies, only then to have to re-present it all as Sociology, to have any chance of surviving the audit-obsessed culture that rules our lives...*

*And this context of increasingly competitive, increasingly frugal funding is far more than just the institutional backdrop to your academic work: it's the determining productive force... the inescapable reality of the material and ideological conditions of your existence...*

*In this world, if you don't throw your lot in with the big boys, what hope is there? The established disciplines control the academic world – they aren't going to cede ground.*

*You aren't going to get grants from research council boards composed of disciplinarians who understand and believe only what they have been trained in, who scratch the backs of their loyal friends and colleagues.*

*They're not going to let you lot in to share their precious resources, to do your crazy, destabilizing, upstart research, and to produce new generations of improperly disciplined scholars.*

*Look at where you are situated in the political economy of British higher education.  
None of you are sitting pretty in the gilded chairs of the grand old universities – there are  
barely even any of you in the self-appointed elite of the Russell Group.  
Most of you are toiling in the groves of academe where you have to chase every last  
student, begging and bribing them to buy your wares, kowtowing to every fad and whim  
of the market...  
And you, and your new field, will, realistically, live or die at the hand of the market.*

*No Regius professorships or royal stamps of approval on the APS will save you. (The  
Royal Society of Psychosocial Studies doesn't quite trip off the tongue).  
None of the Balliol PPErs or Bullingdon boys who rule the country have heard of you...  
And how long will it be until a Psychosocial Studies graduate becomes a SPAD, makes it  
into the senior civil service, or onto the front bench to argue for the value of your  
knowledge?*

*Wow... Listen to \*you\*... bemoaning your exclusion from the ESRC board, Oxbridge  
High Table, and the corridors of power...  
Whatever happened to the celebration of marginality, the recognition that innovation and  
creativity only really take place at the edges?  
Disciplinary recognition would be the death of you – disciplines are the problem.  
They do what they say on the tin: they discipline.  
Enjoy your outsider status, revel in your non-inclusion.*

*De-territorialization is the way to go.  
Fields are the problem – it's all about 'commons' now.  
What happened to your anarchist feminism, the spirit of Greenham?  
You took down fences, you didn't build them....  
You sold out.  
You bought the idea that knowledge should be, could be, contained, owned, separated  
and parcelled out, farmed, domesticated....  
Remember the violence of the Enclosures...*

*You might want to erect boundaries, but not everyone wants to live behind them...*

*Think about it. Hard...*

*Do you really want to embark on a course of action aimed at disciplinary recognition, along a road leading inexorably towards subject 'bench marking', 'frameworks for research excellence', and incorporation into the modes of academic governance that you rail against?*

*And, can't you even see how uncool all this is?*

*Projects of futurity are so passé.*

*It's all about the anti-social now.*

*Failure and indifference are the thing.<sup>4</sup>*

*Your optimism, as Lauren Berlant would say, is cruel<sup>5</sup> – you yearn for what cannot be, for that which shall never come to pass.*

*Your investments of time and energy are hopelessly misguided, directed by the overweening power of contemporary academic neo-liberal governmentality, destined never to deliver on their promise, which will always remain tantalisingly out of reach.*

*Haven't you heard, it's not 'Yes we can' anymore.*

*It's 'I would prefer not to' – Bartelby<sup>6</sup> is today's hero...*

*Right now, this very day, down at Goldsmiths, the next generation of queer theorists are discussing 'radical negativity'.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> On the 'anti-social' and failure, see Bersani (1995), Edelman (2004), Halberstam (2008; 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Berlant (2011).

<sup>6</sup> Melville (1853).

<sup>7</sup> <http://radicalnegativity.com/>

*And here you are, trying to build a field.*

*How utterly naïve and 20<sup>th</sup> century you are, with your belief in institutionalisation, in progressive change, in the development of more adequate forms of knowledge, in thinking your intellectual struggles might eventually do justice to the complexity of the world and the lives and troubles of its people.*

## **PART 2**

SIGH....

There. That was a little insight into my exhausting internal conversation, my own personal, psychosocial madness – or perhaps, a glimpse of the hyper-reflexivity that keeps me attached to others, to the multiplicity that is criticality.

And maybe some of you are similarly tormented, and maybe we can enter into dialogue with my tormentors, all of whom have a point – and should be listened to.

For we can, I believe, only proceed by listening to the critics, the sceptics, the realists, the paranoid, the hostile, the too-cool-for school – because they are amongst us, they are within us.

Yet, despite the ambivalence, the absence of single-mindedness, the hyper-reflexive critique, about this project of establishing Psychosocial Studies, here we all are, a full house, a sold-out gathering of colleagues from 28 universities, and several NHS trusts, sitting together in the auspicious surroundings of this great national institution, where knowledge is treasured, preserved, and indeed created, for our shared cultural life and human flourishing. We have all invested time and money in being here today, which, in this time-pressured, financially-squeezed

era, suggests some inkling of a belief in the value of the field and even in its institutionalisation. And I for one, in my more unitary moments, feel that there is a worthwhile, considered rationale, a collective purpose behind our gathering today.

Having laid before you the voices of the critics and sceptics, I move now into a different, more positive register, not in order to drown out, or crush, or forget the negativity and the pessimism, but, in an inclusive spirit of dialogue and expansive enquiry, to explore what the case might be for our project. The terrain I will sketch is not an attempt to map what the field of Psychosocial Studies is or might be – many of you here have done this already and many more will attempt to do it, and I welcome all such attempts. Rather, I offer an argument for our project of establishing the field in three modes – historical, political and philosophical.

### **The historical argument**

Let's look first at the historical element of the argument for our project, and let's do this, as is fashionable at the moment, through the lens of 'big data'. I was challenged to see what 'big data' might have to say that could possibly be of interest or relevance to Psychosocial Studies by my fellow members of the APS Steering Committee, who set off excitedly down a side-road in one of our recent meetings (as they are wont to do), discussing the explosion of interest in the massive data sets that are being gathered by corporations, governments and big science. I found myself baffled by my colleagues' interest in this overhyped topic, but, as Chair, I let the discussions run for some time, up hill and down dale, before trying to guide them back to the more mundane issues at hand. However, one of the reasons I love working with this bunch of people is that they get under my skin, and I found myself, not long afterwards, starting to dip my

inexperienced, qualitative toe into the big data pool, taking the temperature, seeing what it was like.

And this is what I found.<sup>8</sup>

We are investing in a business that is on an upward trajectory. According to Google Scholar, ‘psychosocial studies’ is on the rise. This is what a search for the term ‘psychosocial studies’ suggests:

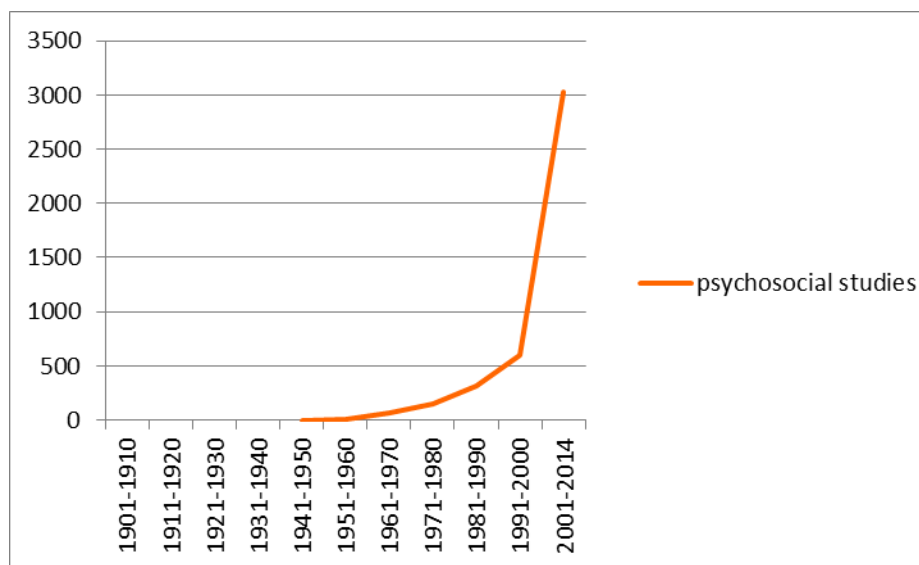
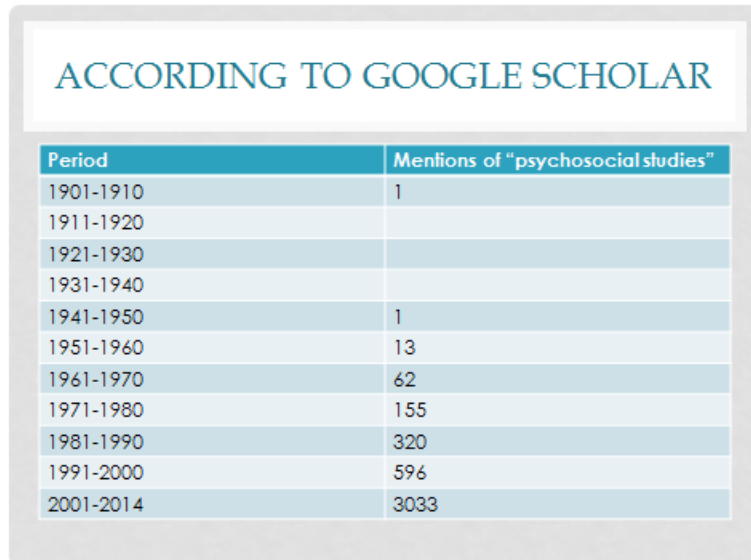


Figure 1: Google Scholar search for ‘psychosocial studies’

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<sup>8</sup> With thanks to Jenny Bredull for her patient research assistance. All the Google Scholar and Google Books searches that follow were conducted in May 2014.



ACCORDING TO GOOGLE SCHOLAR

Period	Mentions of "psychosocial studies"
1901-1910	1
1911-1920	
1921-1930	
1931-1940	
1941-1950	1
1951-1960	13
1961-1970	62
1971-1980	155
1981-1990	320
1991-2000	596
2001-2014	3033

Figure 2: Google Scholar search for ‘psychosocial studies’

The first recorded mention was the Report of the Secretary of the 1908 American Psychological Association, A.H. Pierce (1909), in *Proceedings of the seventeenth annual meeting of the American Psychological Association* in Baltimore. ‘Psychosocial studies’ then appears once in *The Teachers’ College Record* in 1949 – where Benjamin Wolman refers to ‘descriptive psychosocial studies of the child, the teacher, and society’, and then again in the early 1950s: in *Acta Paediatrica* – where S. Heinild (1952) coined the term ‘psychosocial paediatrics’ and reported that ‘the changed position of women in the home is demonstrated as a cause of illness in children’; and in *Journal of the National Medical Association*, in an article by Charles W. Collins (1952) entitled: ‘Psychoanalysis of Groups: critique of a study of a small negro sample’ – which is a powerful and important critique of the racism and poor methodology of a study by Columbia University psychiatrists Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey (1951), ‘The Mark of Oppression’.

Then, in the 1970s there are a number of appearances of the term in the institutional affiliation of authors based at the (first) Center for Psychosocial Studies, which was established as a private not-for-profit research institution in 1973, drawing on members of the University of Chicago faculty and of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Association. The Center for Psychosocial Studies was ‘dedicated to fostering multidisciplinary research in the humanities, psychology and the social sciences, and also committed to applying such research to public policy’.<sup>9</sup> However, The Centre changed its name to the Center for Transcultural Studies in 1986, giving up on the notion of psychosocial studies shortly before many others started using it.

The term then really takes off in the 1990s – which, it’s pleasing to find, is consistent with the stories many of us have been telling about the development of Psychosocial Studies in the UK.

However, we must note that the search term here is ‘psychosocial studies’ (which includes its hyphenated twin)<sup>10</sup>, in its lower case sense. Only the tiniest minority of appearances of the term, even in the past decade, refer to Psychosocial Studies in a disciplinary/ field sense, the vast majority being ‘psychosocial studies’ of x, y, or z, largely in the fields of medicine, psychiatry and psychology.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/transcult/cps.html>

<sup>10</sup> There is a long standing debate in the field about the ontological and epistemological implications of hyphenating, or not: ‘psychosocial’ or ‘psycho-social’. See Hoggett (2008).



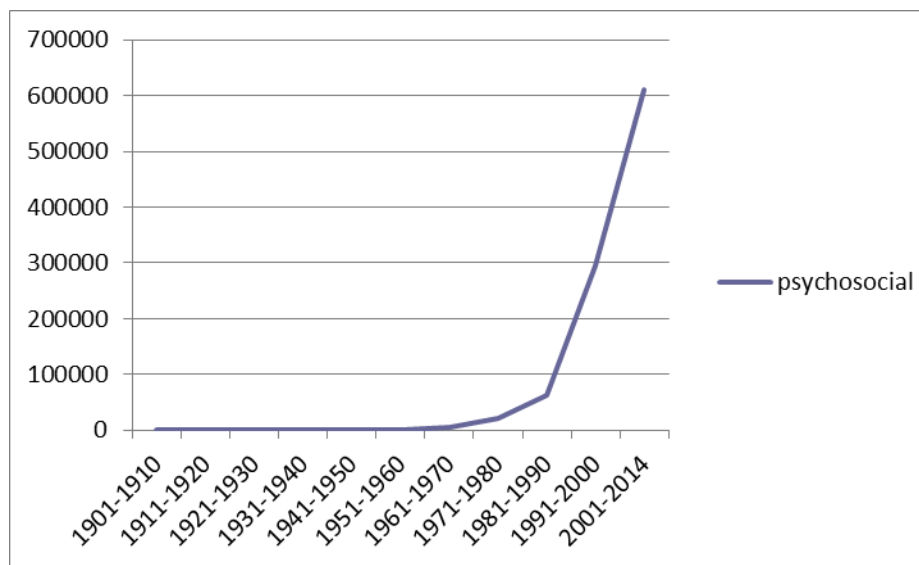


Figure 3: Google Scholar search for ‘psychosocial’

And this is what Google Scholar tells us about the word ‘psychosocial’, detached from ‘studies’: it appears as early as 1800 (although figure 3 doesn’t show this), and builds slowly through the twentieth century, becoming more prevalent in the early 1950s, particularly in psychiatry and medical journals, (such as American Journal of Psychiatry, Psychiatric Quarterly, Journal of Personality, and The Journal of the American Medical Association). Then, there has been a very steep rise since the 1990s.

ACCORDING TO GOOGLE SCHOLAR	
Period	Mentions of "psychosocial"
1901-1910	85
1911-1920	99
1921-1930	152
1931-1940	236
1941-1950	405
1951-1960	1601
1961-1970	6180
1971-1980	20700
1981-1990	63160
1991-2000	295700
2001-2014	611100

Figure 4: Google Scholar search for 'psychosocial'

Looking at the two terms together, we can see how much more widely 'psychosocial' is used than 'psychosocial studies', and how much more steeply its frequency has increased.

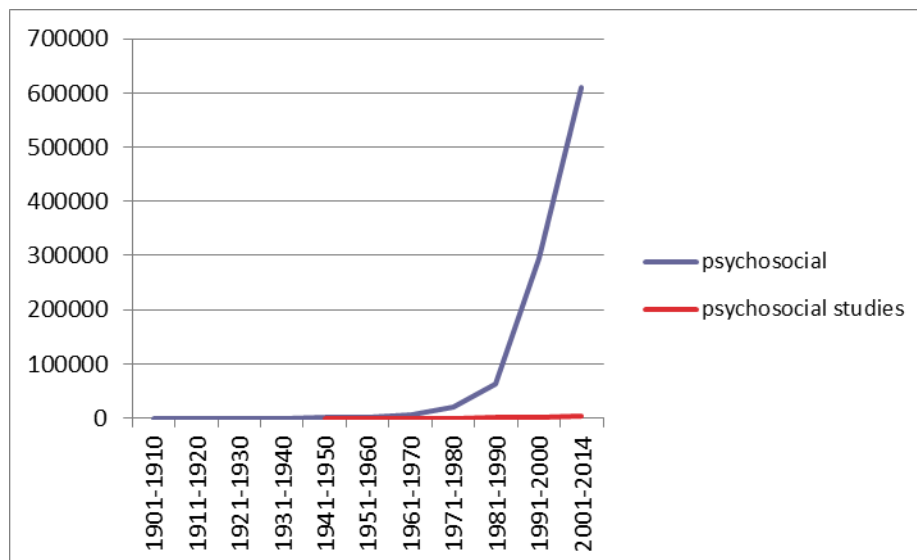


Figure 5: Google Scholar search for 'psychosocial' and 'psychosocial studies'

So, that's Google Scholar – which trawls the full text of a wide (but unspecified) range of scholarly literatures across the world in many different formats. I was on a roll now, starting to develop a little obsession with what 'big data' might do for psychosocial studies.

What about Google Books, the digitized collection of over 5.2 million books published between 1500 and 2008? Those geeks in Mountain View, California have released the Google Ngram Viewer, an online tool to represent graphically the usage of n-grams (letter combinations - words or phrases) across this enormous data set. This is what the search found, charting this time the appearance of the words 'psychoanalysis', 'psychosocial' (without the hyphen), and 'psycho-social' (with the hyphen), from 1880-2008. We can see the emergence of psychoanalysis, and its rise during the mid-twentieth century, and we can see the impressive rise of 'psychosocial' (without the hyphen), never catching up with psychoanalysis, and the much lower, but steadier frequency of 'psycho-social', with the hyphen, across the century:

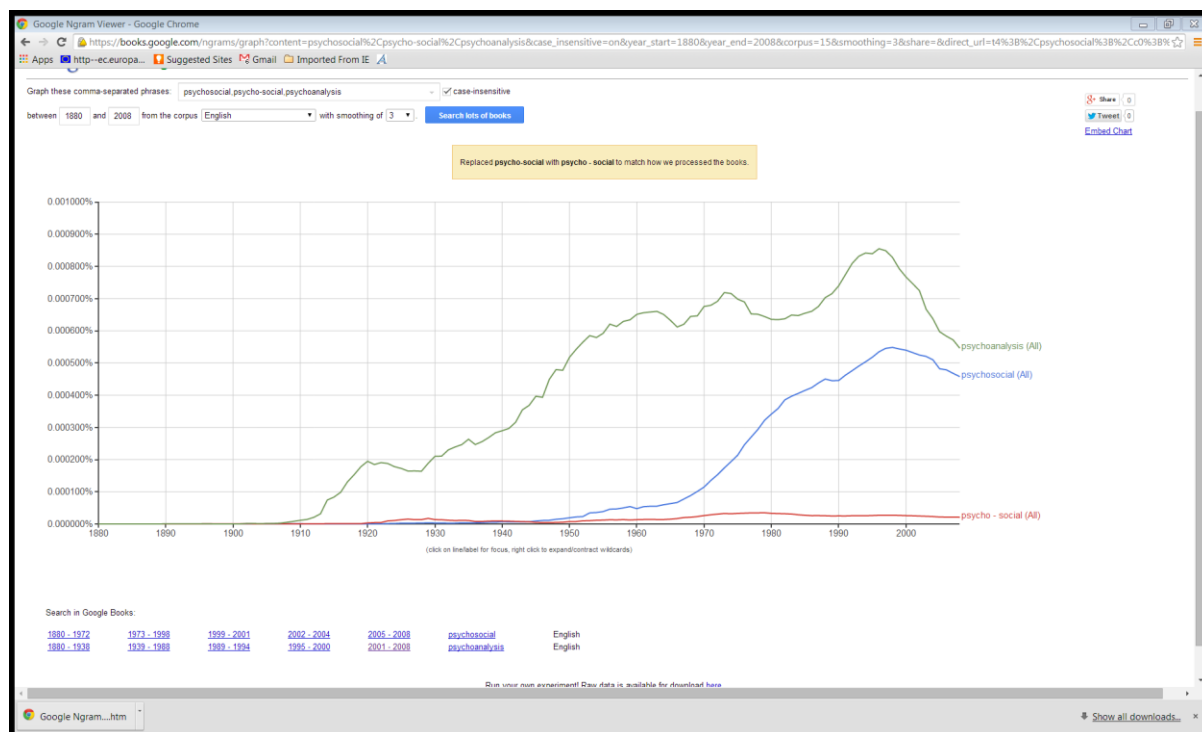


Figure 6: Google Books N-Gram: ‘psychoanalysis’, ‘psychosocial’, psycho-social’

The picture is considerably less rosy, however, when we compare ourselves with the parental figures of psychology and sociology. Whilst not negligible, we are still very minor players in the world as mapped by Google Books.

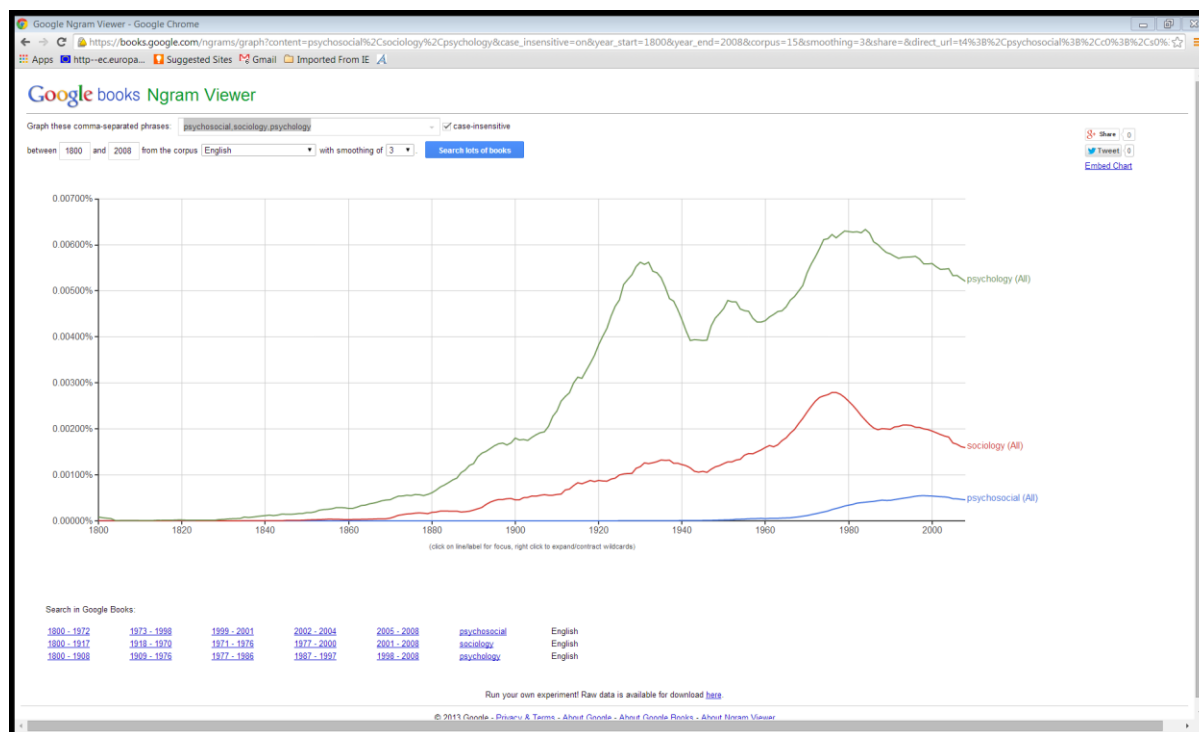


Figure 7: Google Books N-Gram: 'psychology', 'sociology', 'psychosocial'

Yet (and I might need to ask for your indulgence here) when charted against a love object even dearer to me than psychosocial studies - the poodle (this is Misha, my companion animal) -

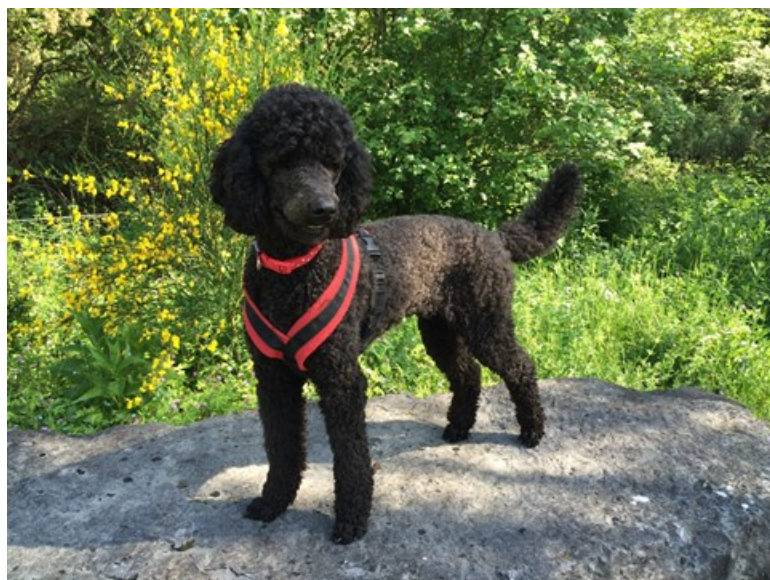


Figure 8: Misha

you can see that the psychosocial is clearly on the ascent:

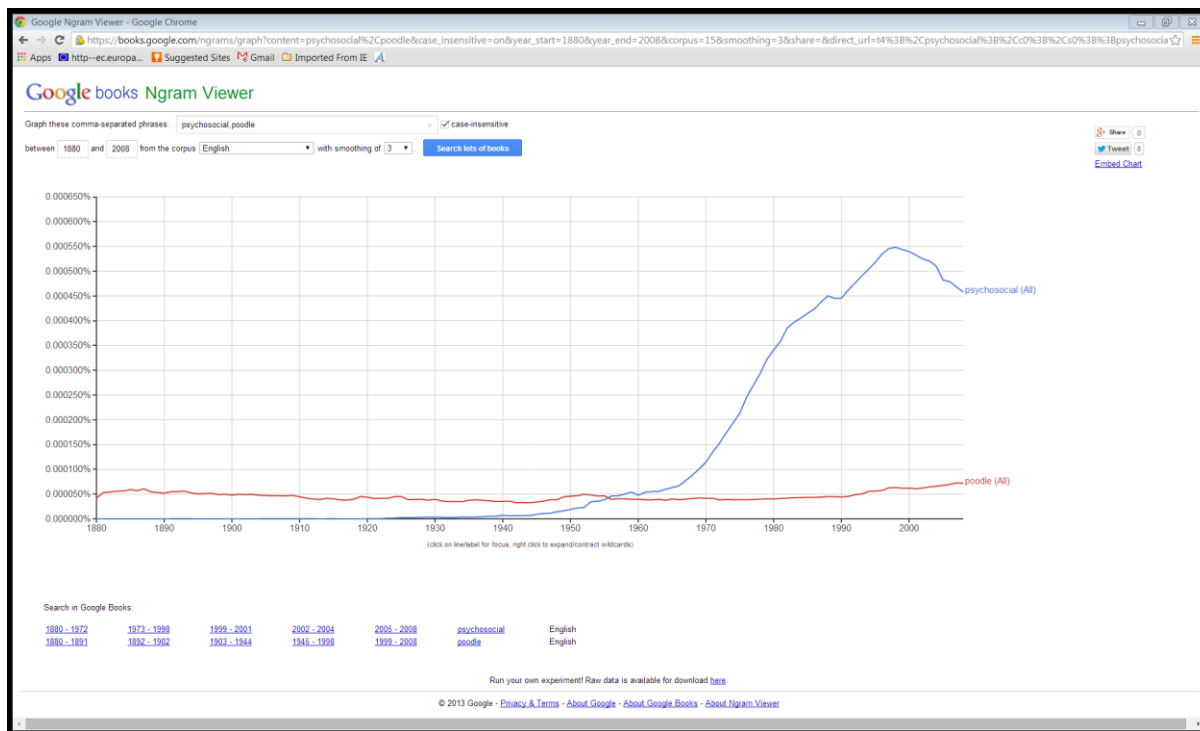


Figure 9: Google N-Gram: ‘psychosocial’, ‘poodle’

Moving rapidly on, and with respect and gratitude to our hosts today, the British Library, this rather manic graph shows the monthly occurrence of the terms ‘psychosocial’, ‘sociology’ and ‘psychology’ in the archive of selected websites, curated by the British Library’s UK Web Archive since 2004, which again shows how small we are – but makes us look more like the poodle in the Google Books N-Gram, in our consistency and steadiness.

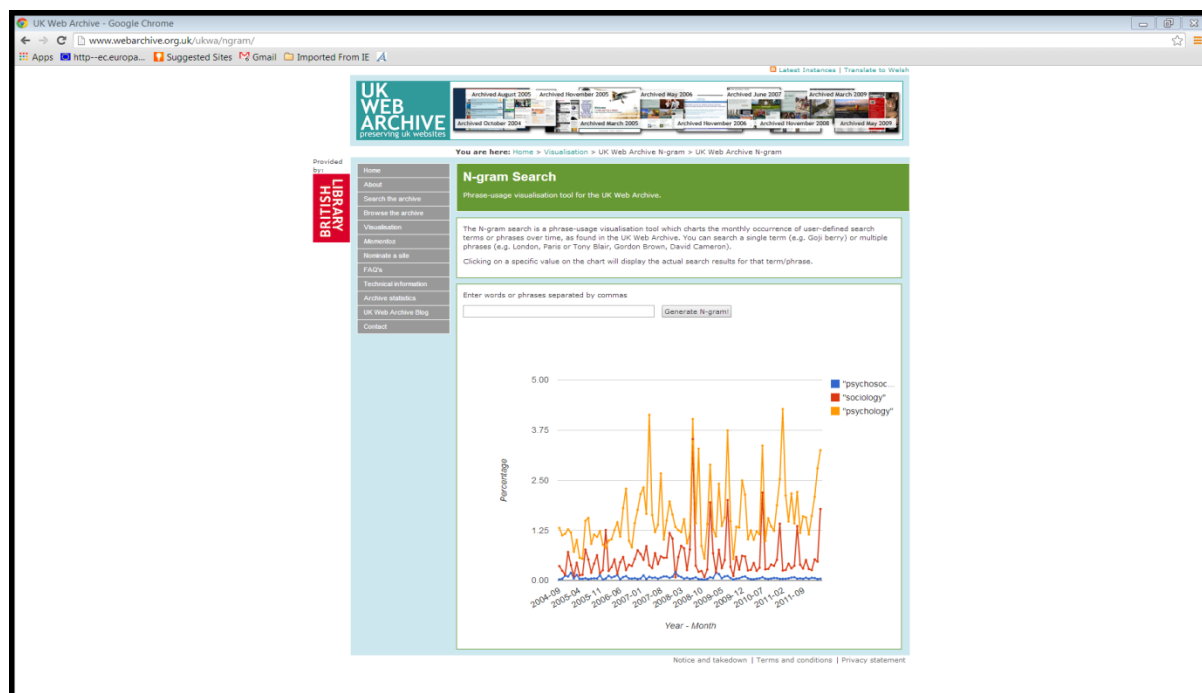


Figure 10: UK Web Archive N-Gram: ‘psychosocial’, ‘sociology’, ‘psychology’

Although, when ‘poodle’ and ‘psychosocial’ are plotted against each other, you see that both have been subject to spikes in interest over the months since 2004, and that the psychosocial is rather more popular on UK websites, at least as curated by the UK Web Archive, than is the poodle, which is a good sign for us here today.

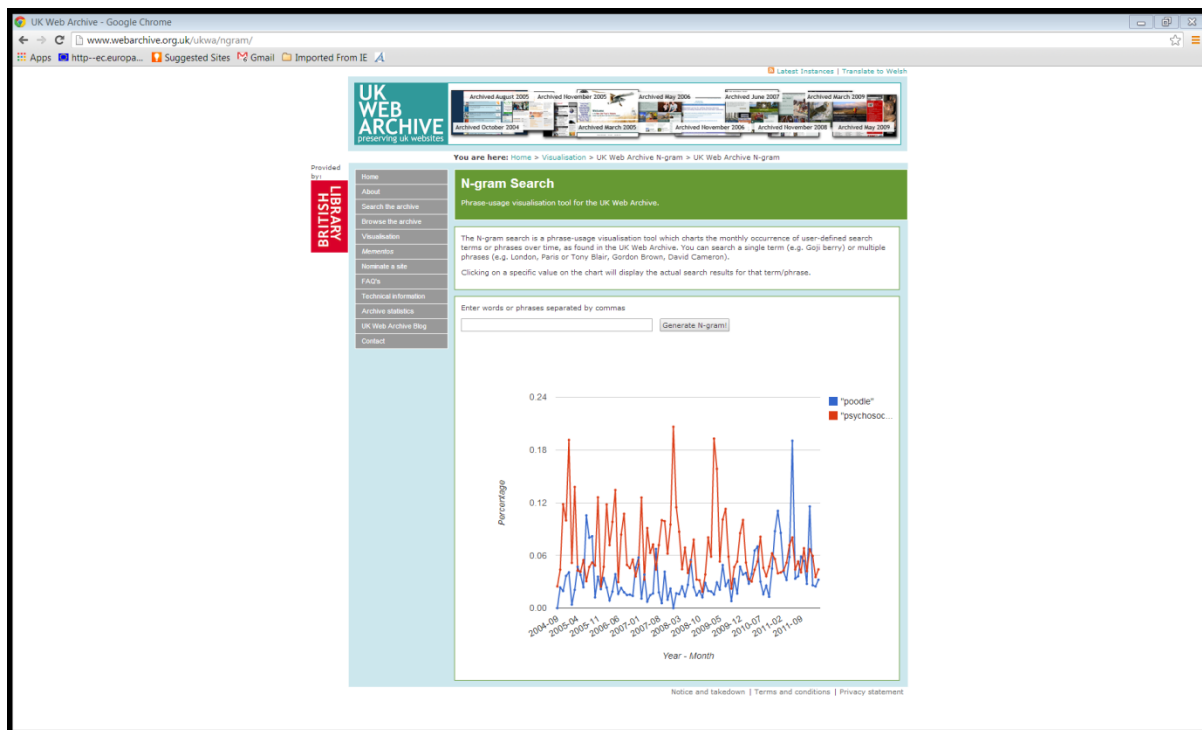


Figure 11: UK Web Archive N-Gram: ‘psychosocial’, ‘poodle’

Am I not taking big data seriously enough?

Please forgive me. I think a sense of humour will be vital in building Psychosocial Studies...

I *do* think that there is an interesting and important suggestion in this data – an empirical, historical argument about the dramatic rise in the use of term ‘psychosocial’, and, to a lesser extent, in ‘psychosocial studies’, which largely means empirical research with a ‘psychosocial’ referent. The psychosocial might not be as popular a concept as psychoanalysis, psychology or sociology, but its explosion across the scholarly literature is in no doubt.

However, this overview from the perspective of big data tells us very little about the substantive content and meaning of the term ‘psychosocial’ that is experiencing this dramatic increase in



usage. Much more work would be needed to ascertain the extent to which this trend might be understood as something more than the aggregation of isolated, individual data points, and to explore whether there is an emergent, global intellectual movement characterised by a self-consciousness about the use of the concept and a commitment to its explicit development and theorisation. Here we start to enter the terrain of the political - the politics of knowledge.

### **The political argument**

To pursue the question of what ‘the psychosocial’ might *mean* in the practice of research in the UK, I engaged in an exercise in ‘small data’ analysis - looking at the abstracts of all the projects that have been funded by the ESRC which used the term ‘psychosocial’ (with and without a hyphen) in their abstracts.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> As available on [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk) (analysis carried out in April 2014).

ESRC FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS			
Years	Psychosocial lite	Middle- ground	Strong
1981-1985	1	-	-
1986-1990	-	-	-
1991-1995	2	-	-
1996-2000	5	1	-
2001-2005	6	1	4
2006-2010	11	3	6
2011-present	6	4	-
total	31	9	10
£	5,079,228	886,614	1,354,821

Figure 12: Categorisation of ESRC funded research projects using ‘psychosocial’ in their abstracts

A total of 50 projects, with start dates ranging from 1998 to 2013 were identified, funded to the tune of £7, 323, 709. I categorised the funded projects into three groups – according to how I understood their use of the term ‘psychosocial’ – those that used a ‘lite’ notion of the psychosocial; those that occupied a ‘middle ground’; and those that were engaged in what I saw as a ‘strong’ programme of psychosocial research.

‘Psychosocial lite’ are research projects that sought to address, in some way, the social aspects of physical and psychological health, well-being and illness, and is the sort of work that is largely done within medicine, health studies, and psychology. These projects used the term psychosocial as an adjective to qualify a range of concepts: psychosocial determinants, factors, variables,

characteristics, circumstances, issues, adjustment, hazards, adversity, impact, aetiologies, stress, effects, resilience. There were 31 such projects funded by the ESRC.

The ‘middle ground’ projects, of which there were 9, used the term ‘psychosocial’ to reference their social science orientated concern with emotions or emotional life, or had a more expansive sociological/ societal understanding of the social than ‘psychosocial lite’ research, but all remained within established disciplinary paradigms, primarily of either psychology or sociology.

The 10 projects that seemed to represent what I’m calling a ‘strong programme’ in psychosocial research articulated either an implicit or explicit challenge to the disciplinary divisions between psychology and sociology, were concerned with the mutual constitution of the psychic and the social and saw the theoretical/ methodological approach that they were taking to the research as ‘psychosocial’ (rather than using the word to qualify other concepts).

The word ‘psychoanalysis’ did not appear once in any of the 50 abstracts; ‘psychoanalytically-informed’ appeared twice, in two of the ‘strong programme’ projects of which Wendy Hollway was PI.

Looking at the start dates of these projects, what we see is a growth in research funding awarded by the ESRC to projects that identify in some way with the notion of the psychosocial, and a growth since the early 2000s in ‘strong programme’ psychosocial research. But we also see that such research is still very much in the minority of the funded research that employs the term.

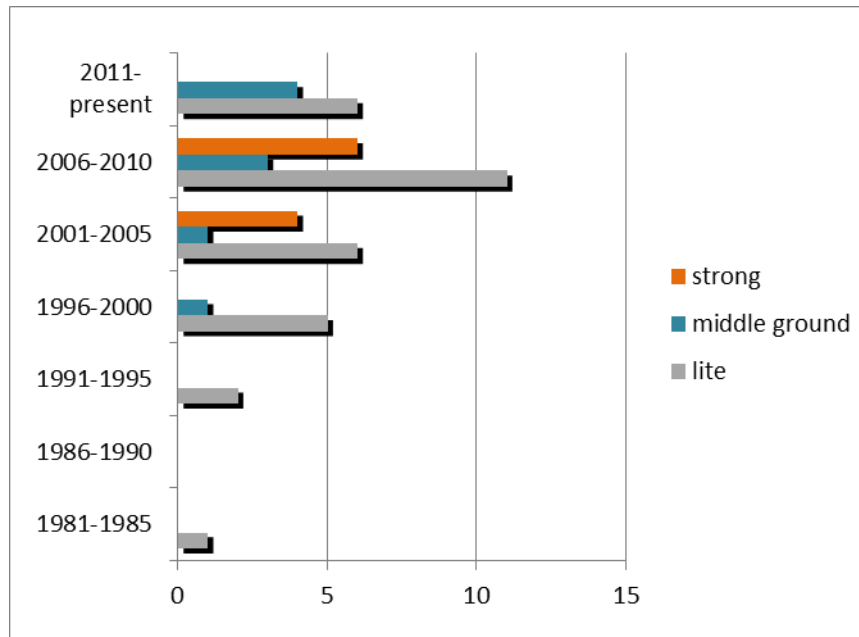


Figure 13: Categorisation of ESRC funded research projects using ‘psychosocial’ in their abstracts

So, what does this mean for us here today? As far as I know from the registrations for today’s event, and applications to join the Association for Psychosocial Studies, none of the researchers funded to carry out what I have categorised as ‘psychosocial lite’ and ‘middle ground’ psychosocial research have attached themselves to our shared project. Perhaps they have read the ‘strong programme’ statements on our website, and do not feel these represent their intellectual interests and theoretical commitments, or perhaps, and more likely, I fear, they have not come across us yet. Either way, they don’t ‘need’ the APS, or they haven’t yet realised their need.

Their concerns are able to be incorporated within the existing disciplines, albeit perhaps somewhat at the margins – after all, the social has never been at the centre of psychological or

medical concerns, and emotional life has historically been excluded from real consideration in the social sciences.

But I want to suggest that for the strong programme to thrive, we need to organise ourselves. We need to be more than individual data points on an N-gram, strung together by the quantitative story-telling power of Google's big N.

Whilst the ESRC doesn't (yet) publish data that would allow us to research unsuccessful grant applications, many of us here today know all too well that work that falls between the disciplines, that challenges their fundamental tenets, does not often find receptive readers and evaluators amongst the grant giving (and withholding) bodies.

So, I want to suggest, we need to articulate a collective voice in order to be heard by the ESRC, the AHRC, the British Academy, HEFCE, the Academy of Social Sciences, and the research charities. We need to band together to contribute to consultations and reviews of research priorities, strategic directions, and funding and evaluation mechanisms, if we are to have any hope of getting the existence of our field acknowledged, our problematics considered, our graduate students funded. We need to nominate trusted and esteemed colleagues onto boards and committees, and as Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences. But we also need to submit more 'strong programme' psychosocial research projects, and we need to track their outcomes.

And our collective voice will, at times, be needed to speak with vigour and clarity to university employers - to lobby for the establishment, development and, undoubtedly in the future, the

survival of our field – because as the fate of women’s studies, gender studies and cultural studies at many universities demonstrates, the new and marginal fields are always at risk in times of retrenchment or when student preferences shift... (indeed, the APS’s forerunner, the Psychosocial Studies Network showed its worth a couple of years ago, in intervening when colleagues at one particular institution were under threat).

We also need a collective presence to demonstrate to publishers that we are worth publishing, and that we constitute a significant market. And we need to speak together, as other disciplines do, to promote our field to prospective students, and, the truth is, to their parents as well, to make the case for the value of the education we have to offer.

Whilst all of this may be seen by the ultra-criticals within and amongst us as a project of incorporation and de-politicization, the pragmatic, realist voices that recognise that as academics we are not, and cannot be, outside the systems and logics of power that structure academic life know that these are politics that we, or some of us at least, have to play.

### **The philosophical argument**

But, I want to conclude with an argument made on philosophical grounds – one that brings me back to the ontological ground from whence I started this talk, which conceives of the psychosocial project as inherently collective, multi-faceted and poly-vocal.

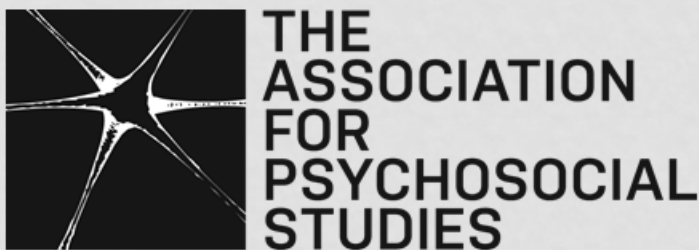
The psychosocial imagination is, I would suggest, at once historical and spatial, prospective and retrospective, theoretical and empirical, specifying and generalizing, quantitative and qualitative,

artistic and clinical, microscopic and macroscopic, global and local, literal and metaphorical, poetry and prose, and all the spaces in-between these problematic binaries. As such, the psychosocial imagination is not, and cannot be, lodged in the creative capacities of any individual. It is not, and cannot be, the property or product of any single mind. It does not find its full expression in any one book or paper, art work or instance of practice. It is, and can only be, that which is more than the singular, beyond not just the individual but also the dyad.

Emerging through dialogue, debate and disagreement, in the interactive, intersubjective, intermingling, interdisciplinary, interstices that we ourselves create, in the co-present spaces of conferences, workshops and seminars, in asynchronous communication, online, and in our heads, as we read and write for and with each other, it rests on our *association*.

It requires our *association*.

It *\*is\** our association.



And it is for this reason, above all others, ultimately, that we are here today, in the company of our own strongest, loudest, more vociferous critics (well, I am!), to celebrate our Association, to express our commitment to and belief in the value of *associating for psychosocial studies*.

Thank you for being here.

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